

pictures come alive by jellyfishes

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Summary:

Will shows El his sketchbook, which reveals more about himself than he planned.

pictures come alive

Author's Note:

Based on [this anon prompt](#), although I changed it a bit! This ended up being more focused on Will and El being amazing siblings rather than actual Byler content, but there's still some of that too. Thank you for the idea, anon! :)

“Come on, Max, we’re friends now!” Dustin shouts, banging his fists on Dig Dug. “You can tell me how you got the high score.”

“I *did* tell you,” Max rolls her eyes. “I’m just better at it than you.”

Dustin clenches his jaw. “I’m gonna beat you,” he says, digging another quarter out of his pocket and stuffing it in the machine. He mumbles encouraging words to himself as the game starts up again.

Will shakes his head, focusing back on his drawing. He’d used up all his own quarters on Dragon’s Lair, and he doesn’t want to mooch off of his friends today. He thinks Dragon’s Lair has robbed him enough already, anyway. He’s content to sit on the floor next to the group, the sketchbook his mom bought him last Christmas resting over his thighs as he draws the scene around him. Dustin is in full concentration mode, Max standing nearby to taunt him. Mike and Lucas are taking turns on Pac Man, and El is—

Will looks around, eventually spotting her hovering by the prize counter. She looks curious, but bored. Will closes his sketchbook, tucking the pencil in between the pages to keep his place, and crosses the room to stand in front of her.

“Hey, El,” he says, giving her a small smile.

She nods in greeting. “Will,” she says, and then turns to look at the prizes again. “What are these?”

They’ve taken El to the arcade before, but usually she’s so loaded up with quarters from Hopper that she never wanders further than

whatever game she decides to play that day. Earlier, though, Will noticed that she was trying her hand at Dragon's Lair, so he assumes that her quarters went the same place Will's did; down the drain.

"They're prizes," Will explains. "When you earn enough tickets, you can turn them in, and they'll give you something from here."

She stares in wonder at the massive stuffed animals along the back wall.

"Trust me, no one can ever earn those," Will laughs. He points at the glass case that's level with their hips, and says, "This is all we can ever afford. It's cheap candy and, like, whistles."

"Oh," El says, smiling. She points at a rubber bracelet near the front of the case. "Mike gave me this."

"Oh, cool," Will says. He tries to ignore the fact that Mike has never won anything for him, because why would he? "Um, are you okay? If you're bored, I'm sure Mike is about to run out of coins."

"I'm fine," she says. "I'm not very good at arcade games."

Will smiles. "Me either, I just draw most of the time."

El looks down at his sketchbook, nudging it with her hand. "Can I see?"

"Oh, um, sure," Will says, setting it down on the glass in front of them. He opens it up to his unfinished drawing, the only thing done so far being the shape of Dig Dug and Dustin standing in front of it. "I was doing more earlier, um."

He flips the page back once, to see a mostly finished sketch of himself standing in front of Dragon's Lair, all five of the others lined up behind him, watching. "It's not very good, it's just a—"

"Mike," El says, touching the drawing. "Why does he look different?"

Until El pointed it out, he hadn't even noticed that Mike is far more detailed than the rest, more detailed even than himself. He drew every feature of Mike's face, right down to his collection of freckles

and the shadows his eyelashes leave on his cheekbones. Will realizes that he hadn't even drawn the stripes on Lucas' shirt, or the layered necklaces El is wearing. Mike does look out of place, he has to admit.

Will blushes. "He's not different, he's just—It's not done yet."

El hums, waiting for him to flip the page again. The next one is a drawing of just Mike and El, standing to the side and talking to each other. "Sorry," Will says. "I didn't mean to spy on you—"

Like a slideshow, Will's brain plays images of the Mind Flayer, the Upside Down, and Hawkins Lab, all in quick succession. *Spy*. He blocks them out and shakes his head.

"It's okay," El says, brushing her fingers over the page. "I like it."

Will relaxes a bit, flipping through a few half-done pictures of Max and Lucas. There's one of Jonathan, after he'd complained that Will drew everyone else except him. "I purposely made it look bad," Will laughs, when El makes a face at the shaky lines and odd color choice.

Will flips the page again, his blood running cold when he realizes which drawing it is. He tries to skip it, but El catches on too quickly. She holds her hand out to stop him, examining the drawing in front of her.

It isn't too incriminating, Will tells himself. Sure, El is extremely perceptive, but that doesn't mean she'll know—

El hums, like before, only she sounds far too aware.

It's a drawing of Mike, and only Mike, his lips stretched into a huge smile, his eyes squeezed shut like he does when something is so funny that he can't stand to look anymore. Will had spent hours working on this one, alone in his room where no one could make fun of him for it, or ask why he was drawing it. He created an excuse just in case, that Mike had asked him to draw it, but he knows he can't possibly lie to El. She always sees through it.

"I..." Will breathes out, shutting his mouth.

"It's good," El says, looking into Will's eyes. She's so sincere that it

hurts to keep eye contact for too long.

“I’m sorry,” Will says, unsure what else he could possibly say. “He’s, he’s my best friend, and I—He’s easy to draw. Because I know his face so well.” He feels himself digging a deeper hole, falling further and further. “I mean—It’s not, like—”

“Will,” El interrupts. “It’s okay.”

“It’s okay?” Will whispers, feeling dangerously close to tears. Right here in the arcade, with all these people around. That would be a new low, even for him.

El nods, and then closes his sketchbook. “I didn’t mean to make you sad.”

“No, you didn’t,” Will shakes his head, trying to wipe his eyes discreetly. “You didn’t.”

There’s an eruption of shouting and cheering and booing from the other side of the room, Dustin pounding his fists on his chest while he screams, “I won! I won! Suck it, Mad Max!”

Just like that, the moment between Will and El is over.

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“Can I see your drawing book again?” El asks, timidly standing in Will’s doorway.

Her and Hopper came over for dinner, which always leads to movie night, which always leads to a sleepover. Will doesn’t know why Hopper and El haven’t just moved in with them yet, since this happens at least twice a week.

“Um, sure,” Will answers, gesturing for her to come in. He grabs the book off his desk and hands it to her. She sits down next to him on the bed, carefully turning the pages like she’ll break them if she even looks at them too hard. She looks through all of the drawings, from beginning to end.

When she finishes, her eyebrows are scrunched together. “Where is

Mike?”

Will blushes, hoping she didn't notice that *the* drawing is gone. The drawing that Will spent many nights cursing himself for even creating. El didn't tell anyone about it, thankfully, but she never stopped giving him these looks, a cross between worry and sadness. She even stopped holding Mike's hand in front of Will, which he's not sure if he should appreciate or be offended by.

“I took it out,” Will says, wringing his hands together.

“It's gone?” El asks, sounding disappointed.

“Well, no, it's not gone,” Will stands up, sighing. He opens his desk drawer and takes out a few binders. Underneath, flipped upside down, is the drawing. “I just didn't, um, want to look at it anymore.”

He hesitantly gives it to her, watching as her eyes scan the page over and over again.

When she finally looks up, she says, “I told Mike that I want to be his friend.”

Will's eyes widen. “What?”

“I watch a lot of soap operas,” she says. “Romance looks... Scary.”

Will laughs, but it gets caught up in his throat. “Yeah, I guess it is. But—But isn't it worth it?”

“Maybe,” she says. “But I like having friends right now. I've never had friends before.”

“Was Mike upset?” Will asks, wondering why Mike didn't mention it to him. He thought they told each other everything.

“Not really,” El says, and then smiles. “Do you want to know what he said?”

“Yeah?”

“He likes someone.”

“Oh,” Will holds his breath. “Did he say who?”

El nods. “I made him tell me,” she giggles. “But I knew it was you before he said so.”

Will’s head feels like it’s been pumped full of air, and he’s dizzy. He hoped, for *years* , that Mike would feel the same, but he never expected it to actually happen, especially not with El still in the picture.

“He *said* that?” Will gasps.

“Yes. But he didn’t believe me when I said you like him too,” she says, and then hands him back the drawing of Mike. “You should give this to him.”

“No, no, I can’t,” Will shakes his head immediately. “It’s *weird* , El, it’s—”

“It’s beautiful,” she says, smiling at the drawing. “You need to give it to him.”

Will meets her eyes, so full of encouragement and peace and safety. “Okay,” he finds himself saying. “Okay, I’ll do it.”

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Later, when Will and Mike have been together long enough to be considered “steady”, Will draws another picture.

The first one had gone well. Mike burst into tears after Will gave him the drawing, and Will was convinced that he’d ruined the best friendship he’d ever had, until Mike yanked him into a crushing hug and said, “*Me too, Will.*”

This drawing, rather than being a declaration of love, is a thank you.

He spends the entire night creating it, wanting every line and every smudge to be perfect. He has to feign sickness so that El won’t come into his room and interrupt him—El lives in Jonathan’s empty room now, after he went to college and Hopper finally gave in and asked Joyce if they could live together.

When Will finishes, he sets the drawing aside for another hour and looks at it again with fresh eyes, just to be *sure* that it fits his standards. It's late, and he's exhausted, so he decides that it's done.

He knocks on El's door quietly, hoping she hasn't gone to sleep yet. It takes a minute, but then she answers. She's in her pajamas, but she has a few lamps on, so she must not have been sleeping.

"Hey," Will whispers. "Can I come in?"

She nods, stepping back. "Are you okay?" she asks.

"Yeah, I'm good," Will nods. "I just wanted to, um, give you something."

He looks down at the drawing one more time, before handing it over. "It's to say thank you. You've always, always been there for me, even when you didn't know who I was. And everything with Mike, I just—I couldn't have done that without you, El."

She stares at the picture for a long time, so long that Will wonders if she hates it, hates *him*, and—

El giggles, and when she looks at Will, she's beaming. "This is beautiful, Will."

Will breathes out a sigh of relief. "You like it?"

"I love it," she says. She crosses the room, to stand over her desk. She has a cork board on the wall, filled with pictures of her family and friends, everything she thought she could never have. She pins Will's drawing right in the center.

To: my incredible sister El, it reads, scrawled under a realistic portrait of El's face. Thank you for everything.

Author's Note:

Thank you so much for reading!! :)
You can also find me at my [stranger things blog](#),
where I'm taking prompts!